


# LEE REVIEW



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# LEE REVIEW

FALL 2007 - SPRING 2008



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Dear Readers:

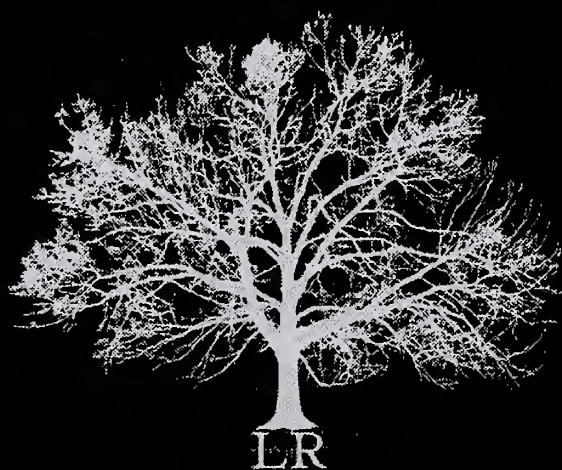
The little black and white nugget you now hold in your hands offers another year's worth of our campus' best literary writing. Submission loads and quality continue to increase, as well as the intrepid efforts of our dogged editorial staff. It is never easy, but it is a labor of love in service to the craft of writing. Both writers and editors work through many drafts to bring to their audience the cleaned-up look that makes this issue seem like a smooth, effortless joyride. We're glad to do it, and we hope that you too enjoy the ride.

This year's issue features the usual genre suspects: poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, an interview with emerging writer Katie Chaple, conducted by Jon Tully, as well as our two award-winning essays on the theme of "spiritual quests" by Ashley Denning and Aubrey Stout. Our University's writing programs continue to grow by leaps and bounds and, as a result, so does the amazing array of wonderful work we have the pleasure of reading through each year. We're proud of the work within, and we're proud of the look of this year's issue. We hope you are too. We'd be proud to feature your work as well. If you'd like to consider submitting send your work to the Lee Review email during our official reading period between September 1 and October 31 at: [leereview@gmail.com](mailto:leereview@gmail.com)

Dr. Chad Prevost  
Faculty Sponsor



# POETRY



# Elegy for My Grandmother's Hands

Nikki Branam

My grandmother's hands were busy,  
Never paused from the practical —  
    The missing button on my best red dress,  
    Beans to break,  
    Clothes to snap on the line, and  
    Dough to turn on the tiled countertop —  
Except to pick up a paintbrush.

She painted barefoot and swayed,  
swishing the swirling starburst batik of her dress.  
Painting autumn from the back stoop,  
with quick, deliberate strokes.

I remember brush strokes as she clutches a trembling spoon,  
spills cream corn onto the polished tabletop,  
looks away. Quick, deliberate  
while I mop up the mess.



# On the Importance of Prayer Cloths

Nikki Branam

My grandmother insisted I stand in the gap for my father's salvation,  
shoulder his transgressions  
in the winding prayer line; wait, waist high,  
for the pastor to touch my head with oil.

When he touched Mrs. Flowers' head and she  
slipped out of her low heeled shoes,  
sensible and second hand -  
danced in stocking feet.

Her elbow connected with my face,  
my mouth filled with blood until I gagged,  
spilling crimson bits of crunched peppermint  
onto the cream lace collar of my dress,  
sticky on the tops of my patent buckle shoes.

I gathered a prayer cloth to my face,  
Pressed it to my lips and nose, and  
watched my blood blossom on the faded mauve cloth,  
hemmed by church ladies from heavy canvas bought at discount.

Squares of modesty, unfurled in slow motion  
a flag at a secret rite,  
draped over the bare legs and ankles, the  
round knees and varicose veins of those fallen  
after mad marathons around the sanctuary.

I have not been initiated into that rite,  
have never been slain in the spirit.  
I haven't needed a prayer cloth, but  
to wipe the blood from the front of my Sunday clothes.

# Letter to a Savior from the Texas Electric Chair

Brandon Brown

Dear Mr. McCullough,

My forehead's still wet with  
A mixture of sweat and the sponge's cool release  
But thanks to you,  
I got a pardon from the top -  
You're my Messiah in a clearance sale tie  
    (Who'da thought Jesus wore loafers)  
Let me tell you,  
I feel like a new man!  
At least until the prosecutor hurls his  
Fiery darts back at the system  
It feels like I've got angel wings  
Pinned under this stiff, orange jumpsuit  
And the chain between these cuffs,  
for now, feels like I'm holding my ticket for St. Peter  
I know all that awaits me at the end of this  
Cold corridor is 60 square feet of  
Echoes and time to myself, but  
The idea of falling back on that rusty cot  
Never sounded so good  
Who knows what awaits come morning -  
Who ever really knows what to expect when  
They open their eyes and wipe away  
The images of  
faceless girls, hopping trains, and winning the lottery  
But I've got my window  
I've got the stale view of scorched grass  
And for now, the grass is greener on my side,  
These steel bars are my pearly gates,  
And I'm ready to come home



# Another Day Passed Today

Kevin Brown

The sun, after rising in the east,  
set in the west. Job, in his odd  
clothing, continued to take the  
abuse of his friends, while

Narcissus sat rapt by the water,  
not moving. Stephen stared at the  
heavens with the Jewish leaders  
gathering their stones, and Socrates  
prepared himself for the hemlock.

Prometheus spent the day with  
vultures gnawing on his liver, but  
St. Teresa passed the time in  
ecstasy, though not without a  
certain suffering of her own.

And all the while, I sat, aloof,  
off in the distance, trying to  
write it all down so that  
we can see it again tomorrow.



# Diagramming Won't Help This Situation

Kevin Brown

Grammatical rules have always baffled me, leaving me wondering whether my life is transitive or intransitive, if I am the subject or object of my life, and no one has been able to provide words to describe my actions, even if they do end in -ly.

But now the problem seems to be with pronouns: I am unwilling to be him, and you are unable to be her, so we will never be them-the ones talking about what they need from the grocery

store because the Rogers are coming for dinner tonight; the couple saving for a vacation, perhaps a cruise to Alaska or a museum tour of Europe; the two who meet with a financial advisor to plan their children's

college fund while still managing to set enough aside for their retirement-and so we will continue to be nothing more than sentence fragments, perfectly fine for effect, but forever looking for the missing part of speech we can never seem to find.



# An Autumn Poem

Jordan Davis

Does it fall down  
Like a leaf, a piece of autumnal grandeur, tumbling in ecstatic winds,  
Down from a branch,  
Wind-rustled and blooming with the blush of cool air?  
Branches can be grasped;  
Air will not be climbed -  
Grasped like a leaf in my palm,  
Climbed like ladders toward a stretch of sky, crisp.

Palms stretch their fingers heavenward,  
Crisp leaves branching like my palms -  
Heaven; branching veins like my veins,  
Palm lining up with my hand,  
Veins pulsing with an organic heartbeat.

Hands, tiny and wild,  
And heartbeats name romantic bests.  
Wildly they together chase after the autumn,  
Besting me. Is it the leaf or is it the wind?  
Autumn grasps after me with long, cold fingers  
Of wind against my cheek, like a forest of branches.  
Fingers dance across mine.

Branches may be climbed to higher heights.  
Mine are steep.  
Height increases with every breath,  
Steeping tea leaves in water to be warm.  
Breathing is visible this autumn evening,  
Warm as steam on my face.  
Evening spreads, cool and bright.

My face warms at the sight of such splendor.  
Bright attitudes, like a blushing leaf or bride,

With splendor and hidden ecstasy.  
Brides blush and fall  
In ecstasy down the aisle toward romance.  
Fall breathes romance through and through;  
Romance that builds you ladders,  
Through fallen leaves from branches.  
Ladders you fail to climb,  
For branches may fall-don't think it.  
Climb; think that it grows.  
It does.



# The sea makes a mockery of any voice...

Joshua Floyd

The sea makes a mockery of any voice  
& dashes any sound upon the shells  
where like a patient stranger they wait,  
arising when the moon calls them to dance.

Like ghosts they wait & wander.  
They've been resting on the shore  
drying & dying in daylight's heated gaze.  
Now night arrives with her pale fury  
& calls each voice to anoint the earth.

I've seen the White Giant  
stalking across the sand.  
The voices rise up to meet her  
like magnetized kisses.  
And out in the sea,  
angels revel in its cool vastness  
& enticing mockery.

Criss-cross rows of angels, sailors, foam & whale bones.  
A fleeing horizon.  
The salt-stained linger of time.

Creep into my room, dear death, we'll take the world tonight,  
Crawl inside my mouth and cringe and pivot on my tongue.  
But beauty separates us, her innocence too bright,  
Her yellow flame will lick and spit until the night is done.  
So death, bring your pliers, we'll sell my teeth as pearls,  
We'll cater copper cocktails to those whose luster is lead.  
You slide your boney fingers, scrawling, feel my toes curl -  
And eating beauty's bodice, we'll spit back out the threads.  
This weakness in my knees, so free, I feel you coming on,  
Chapped lips, chafed hips-your skin is so malign.  
But beauty's light shines forth, creating the illusion of the dawn,  
Dismissing death, relentless, it chose to sidle in my spine:  
Forever with me, both death and beauty dwell,  
Residing deep inside, waiting for the ground to swell.





# Ode on the Departed

Brittany Livingston

I found you  
there -  
purple poppies  
growing in your hair,  
seeds nestled beneath  
your eyelids. The  
aphids scurrying  
silently across your  
skin -  
searching for the sap  
sticking in your veins.  
Muted, moths came  
and settled on the  
moss, canvassing  
your lips and tongue,  
numb -  
as roots trickled  
down your throat  
to a symphony of  
sprouting spores,  
wondering how we  
once believed that  
death -  
made us remote.

# Shaman

Matthew Melton

She reaches out to passersby  
But no one sees her  
No one hears the scars  
Running down her face  
Her skin covers the years  
Like shoe leather over blisters

A cup of water in Jesus' name  
Would evaporate on her head  
She is life and death together  
In one sacred, forgotten place

Shamans dancing on baked earth  
Find an unfixed reality  
Where those who pray for rain  
Slip into the clouds themselves  
And fall gently to the ground  
Scattered among the countless drops

Each drop is a sea of water  
Inside the shaman's veins  
Water enough, they say  
For an infinity of cups



# The Bark of a Hundred Years

Jamie Miller

So much time you have seen pass by with  
lives lost in human wars,  
twisted, cruel beings who destroyed their kind  
and then began on yours.  
You watched, in your immense glory, before  
your secret was exposed and  
whispered with the wind as she  
glided against you with seductive coolness.  
Fallen now, aged with wisdom,  
you lie shrouded in Death's cloak  
as forest creatures scramble by  
in awe of your condemned condition  
Memories flow of your former delight,  
of fledglings tittering on your outstretched arms  
of playful chatter as coupled squirrels darted  
around your trunk, of nighttime companions.  
All comfort in these last days of  
the sunsets that mean nothing but  
everything as silence closes in,  
and all feel you slip away  
who try to remember but soon forget.

My bay swallowed the ocean.  
The reassuring creak of the door guided me as I stepped into the Christmas  
Outside.  
The brisk air and breeze kissed my uncovered ears and nose,  
And behind me, the tail of my scarf waved like a lone ship's flag.  
The naked sea stretched out endlessly before me.  
As the water washed, washed, washed against the cove below me,  
Distant church bells rang over my hill.



# The Four Letter Word

Sonja Palmer

Honey held in my mouth  
Saccharine on my tongue  
The word fine  
Wilts on my lips  
Knowing  
It will dissolve  
Just like the lies before it  
Leaving an aftertaste  
Of words unsaid.  
Fine is a line you never cross  
The bridge that always caves  
The empty room devoid of you.  
"Fine,"

Please know, when I speak it  
I am begging you not to listen.



# The Second Circle

Mandy Panos

Ears pop violently and glassy eyes fly  
Open to blinding city lights  
As I arrive. Abandoned,  
Memories crystallize, threatening  
To send me hydroplaning  
Over the embankment of time.  
Last thoughts in a taxi ride:  
Smoggy bubble over the crater, L.A.,  
Overripe tangerines littered the bee-infested  
Ice plant outside a Pepto-Bismol pink bedroom,  
Salted air weaved through Sago palms,  
The clarity of constellations in your eyes  
One moon-drenched June night. Remnant memories drip  
Into cupped hands, you bring them to your lips  
Like the cup of blood at Mass. We're sitting,  
Listening to the familiar ocean lapping  
Against the Oceanside Pier. At 3 AM  
The party's just getting started  
Across El Camino in a bungalow of drunkards  
And addicts, where you spend most nights. Raw,  
I feel the texture of cracked wood against my legs,  
Concentrate on the scabbing tattoo  
Pressed into your sun-soaked skin.  
I slice the silence, "Petrified wood is a curious condition,  
Organic matter replaced by lifeless elements."  
You're writhing in the second circle of hell, clutching  
Insatiable sins, too high to understand my implication,  
Drifting amongst the buttery stars with hope  
Swept out by a hardened heart.



# First Communion

Caitlin Pierson

She heard the full story from the servants later  
How his mother's voice got that high pitched quality  
As if the string of a lyre was pulled too tight over the frame  
And he reached as if to touch the jars, but pulled away  
Without looking, uttered directions to the waiting kitchen hands.

She did not need them to tell her.  
When the guests cheered her father's wine stores  
A tongue of fire hit her chest.  
It was him  
Blessing a wedding that could've easily been his  
Even in the midst of the revelry as on that day  
When he reached as if to touch her face  
But pulled away at the sound of another of Simon's questions.

She would have known without the servants' whispers  
As all the wedding party reveled in the richness of the drink  
She held the cup to her lip, but only tasted tears  
Passover brine  
The tears of the Israelites in slavery  
Waiting for a savior

The new rumors were of his death.  
She dropped the water jar.  
Mathias surely knew by then, but didn't ask  
What it was like to take walks with him  
By the sea, imagining where all the ships would take them  
Later learning that he was 'never meant to stay'  
Did not apply to Nazareth.

She did not need a rabbi to inform her.  
He was the Messiah.  
It was most visible now.  
Who else but a savior could lead his people  
For forty years through the desert?

# Love Like Mayflies

Jon Tully

“And last of all he appeared to me also;  
as to one abnormally born.”

You always had  
that special way  
to make me feel unwanted.  
The awkward hugs  
the proffered hand—  
stiff with rigor mortis.  
The once fruitful calls  
dropping off slowly  
like mayflies,  
serving their function  
then dying  
before their love cools.



# Pandora Like Me

Jon Tully

I'd like to take hold  
of this pretty box  
and clutch it tightly  
against my chest

But a box, it seems  
is not to be touched  
by someone like me  
Pandora, like me

They say that all nature  
of sin and disease  
lay just inside  
of this little box

But my box, it seems  
cannot contain  
such dreadful things  
such evil things

They warned me not  
to flip the lock  
of this little box  
that holds the night

But this box, it seems  
was made to be seen  
by someone like me  
Pandora, like me

I'll just take a peek  
a quick little peek  
to see the gems

of this pretty box

For a box, it seems  
must contain treasure  
for someone like me  
Pandora, like me

One time, just for fun  
and who would I tell?  
No harm can come  
from this pretty little box

I'll keep it a secret  
and no one will know  
of someone like me  
Pandora, like me







Bobby was a Racehorse

Leandra Webb



Waterspout

Genevieve Correia







Mayberry

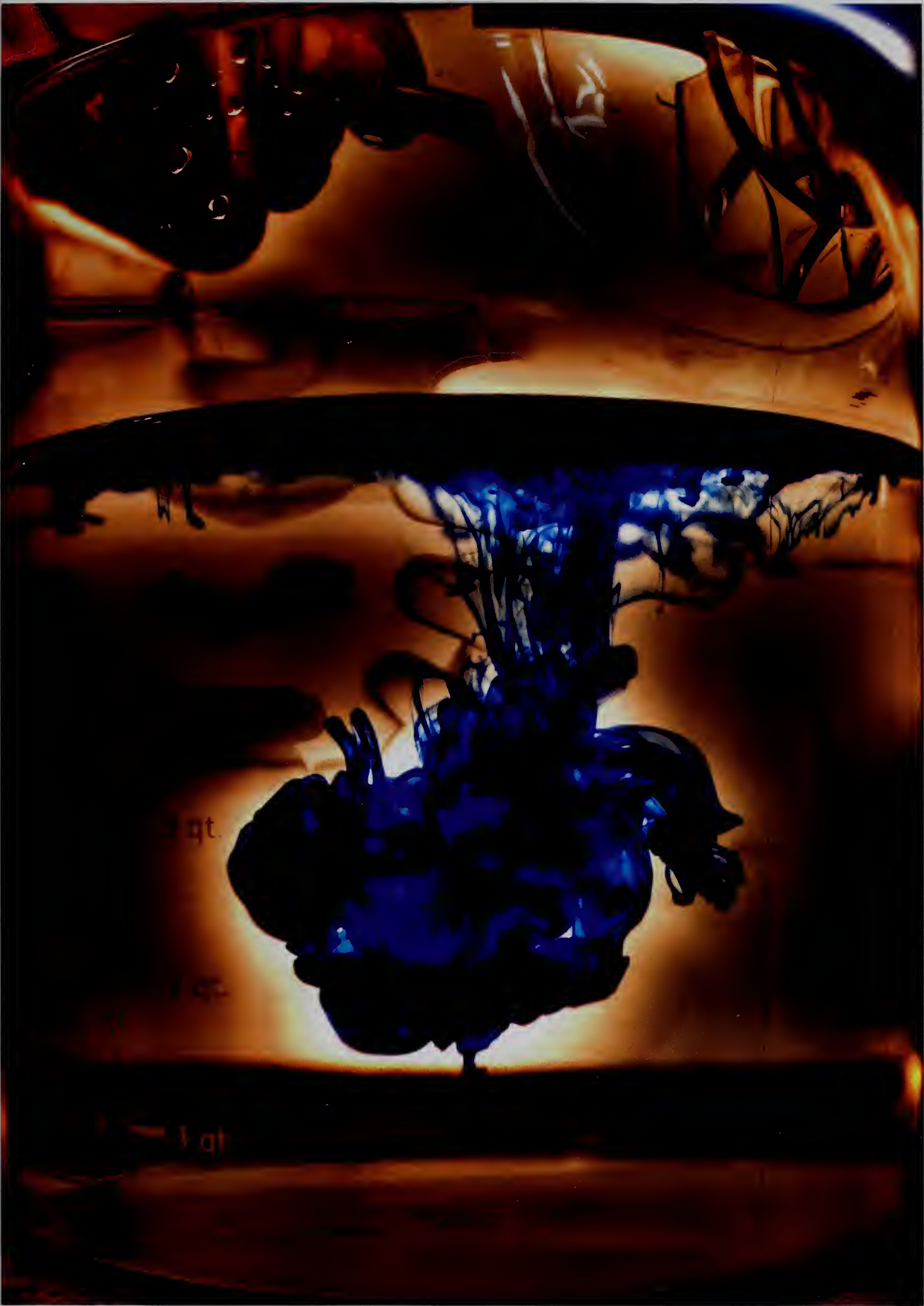
Chandra Berry



Avventura Veniziana

Kristin Fulcher





Ink Heart

Alex Lisic





Gazebo

Chris Sirico







Retrospect

Brittany Livingston





Movie Steps

Josh Warlick



# FICTION



LR

I know what many of you are thinking right now. You all are asking yourselves, "Why is he here?" I know that all of you simple townsfolk recognize me from television because even though you are out here in the boondocks and have no idea what the world is like, you simple folks still have your television. I know that all of you are still in awe that someone like me would grace your tiny backwoods town. I mean, after all, you no doubtedly have seen me rubbing shoulders with all the other superstars of the world. Yeah, that's right—Brad and I are great friends and I am actually the godfather of his and Angelina's child.

I am sure that some of you no doubt have even heard my new album. Yes, I said that right, my new album because my talents do not end at the silver screen alone. My new album features some of today's hottest musical minds such as Justin and Britney amongst many others, and it is being hailed as one of the greatest albums ever by such great musical magazines as the Hamburg Herald. Some of you are probably wondering why you've never heard of such a magazine because, if it was such a great magazine, surely you would have heard of it. Well, my only question to you is have you ever heard of the Billington Times? No, I thought not. These magazines are so elite that I'm sure you've never heard of them, and I must say that I'm in such a league that I would never reach the pages of the Hokie-Poke Forum,





but enough about magazines, back to me. I have recently discovered that my boundless talents transcend everything that I put my hands to, but none of this answers your question of "Why is he here of all places?"

Well simply put, I am here because I am one of you. That's right; greatness was born in this very town if you can believe it. I was not only born here, but I grew up on that street right over there, and I was also a stock clerk over at Watson's Grocery.

Now, I am sure many of you are saying to yourselves, "How is this possible?" and "How could somebody this great come from here and we didn't even know it?" Well, my answer to that is simple: I made sure that none of you would know about it. That's right, when I left here, fully realizing my own destiny for greatness, I changed my name and erased any association with this place. This was no easy task, I might add, since my family lived here for generations, and my grandparents still live here. To ensure my family's silence I had to make it known that I meant business. The solution came to me in the form of Fluffy, my family's dog. Once Fluffy was used as an example to the rest of my family, they all fell into line and knew they had to play ball.

I'm sure all of this raises yet another question in your meager minds. I'm sure all of you are asking yourselves, "Why is he announcing all of this

now?" Especially at your peoples' small town graduation, and I would like this moment to say congratulations to this year's class. I would also like to say it is possible for all of you to become great like me, even though it's not likely. There is no harm in trying. I would secondly like to thank the school administration for allowing me to come and speak after they discovered my true identity, but once again, enough of that and back to me. I'm here to tell you that now since I have everything, I feel that it is time for me to give back to the community I came from. So simply put, I am allowing you people to claim me as one of your own. That's right, you can claim that I came from amongst you, and you even have my permission to build a golden statue of me in the town square if you feel the need to. I would actually go on to recommend that you townsfolk take into consideration such an idea because I'm sure that it would help out your dwindling economy.

In return for me helping you townspeople out in this way, I'm asking for only one small favor in return. Now I'm sure all of you are saying, "Oh great, what could we possibly do for this great man?" Well, what I'm asking is nothing all that spectacular. I'm sure all of you know Jenny Eckhart. She and I used to be really close when I was attending this very high school here, and she wronged me greatly during that time. She not only hurt me with a



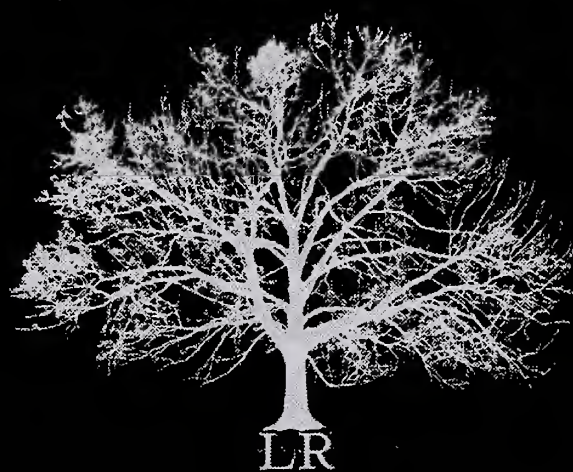
simple act of infidelity with just one man, but that daughter of harlotry cheated on me with the whole football team. Jenny then went on to tell me that I was nothing special and that I would end up being a simple nobody like all of you. I'm sure you all can't believe she would say something so cruel to somebody like me, but she did.

Now that you all know the story, and I'm sure you feel my heartache at being told such things, all I'm asking is that you punish her. I don't care exactly how you do it, but her grievous mistake needs to be paid for in full. I would do it myself, but I'm sure you all understand my position, being as how I am who I am and all of you are who you are. I'm sure you also understand that it would hurt her more since she is one of you, just as I am. Like I said, I don't care how you do it or what you do with the body, but I guarantee you that once the authorities know why you did it they will understand; after all, you will just be protecting one of your own. So once you step back and look at the benefits of helping me out, you will realize that you are doing the right thing by helping out such a great guy as myself, and I don't feel I need to mention that, if you don't, you will not be able to claim me as one of your own. I mean if you aren't good enough people to help out one of your own in such a manner, then I guess you all don't deserve to claim me as one of your own, but I am fully confident in all of

you to come to the right decision. With that, I wish you all the best of luck in your future task, and I look forward to being part of your community; and with that, I wish to say thank you all and may you all have a good night.



# NONFICTION





The coffin was silver—I was glad of that. I pictured it being one of those faux wood boxes that looked like scraps taken from a 1960's trailer, but I should have known that her parents would have more style than that. I think she would have been pleased too—she always liked silver jewelry, not gold. The coffin was held up by large, thick straps above the crater it would soon be lowered into, and then leveled with the rest of the freshly mowed sod. I'd never seen it happen and I wouldn't see it then, but I sincerely hoped they would be careful, not thinking at the time that she wouldn't feel it either way. But then again, a big part of me didn't even want to admit she was in there, let alone that she was dead. Not yet. It was too soon.

I turned my attention instead to the flowers. Gerber daisies dominated the arrangement that covered the coffin, but there were lots of light pink and yellow roses, and carnations too. Yellow was her favorite color, but pink came in a close second; however, they had to be pastel, not too bold—that wasn't her. Danaea came off as being shy to strangers, which was more apparent in big groups, never wanting to draw too much attention to herself on first impression. This trait was one of many things we had in common. We became fast friends when we met in the middle of my sixth grade year after my family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. We even lived in the same neighborhood, and I could easily walk to her house if I felt I could



brave the mountain she called her street. Our neighborhood had a modest pool that we spent hours at between swim practice. She could glide along the water on her back, stroking her arms just enough to propel her body along like a skater's blade on ice. We often competed against each other in swim meets when our age category did breaststroke. I was confident in my ability, but she was faster. Our coach would scream at us to "Push!" as we frantically tried to swim and breathe at the same time. I never understood how he thought we could go any faster. We were both literally skin and bones—there was no muscle to flaunt, and still isn't, really. I eventually moved to a different neighborhood, though, which ended our swim team days. My new neighborhood had a swim team, but my abilities were not up to par with the rest of the team—they were in a completely different league. Plus, all the boys wore Speedos, and that creeped me out just a little.

Once I moved away from Danaea, we still stayed close, but I ended up going to a Christian school for my tenth grade year, and she continued homeschooling, so we didn't see each other much. She fell into depression during that time, which I don't think related to our friendship, but she didn't talk about it much, so I was never sure. Our friendship became stronger during my junior year after her parents invited me to become one of the first employees of Java Roasting Co., a coffee shop they were planning

to open. It became a tradition for Danaea and me to work together on Saturday nights with her dad, Roger. For one reason or another, we usually ended up dropping a dessert, which of course meant that we couldn't give it to a customer, which left us forced to eat it. After a few weeks of this same incident, Roger became suspicious and was skeptical when we told him they were just accidents, a weird coincidence really.

She always liked to tell people that we "practically grew up together," especially after I successfully convinced her to come to Lee following my freshman year. Her dad joked that she had to go to a school that was touching Arkansas, so that she was within driving distance. I kindly pointed out to him that Tennessee does in fact touch Arkansas, so Lee fit into his qualifications. He consented, although the reality of Danaea going to college was not something he wanted to face. Soon after arriving at Lee, Danaea began to fall in love with the campus and the people as I had. She came to Lee knowing exactly what she wanted to do and worked toward her goal for almost three years. She wanted to be a teacher of young children.

Because she was an Early Childhood Education major and a year behind me, we didn't have many classes that overlapped. I was taking Creative Writing and American Literature while she learned how to create lesson plans and successful teaching strategies. The one class in our college





career that we both had to take was Advanced Grammar. It was a struggle for both of us because the class was at 7:45 in the morning twice a week, but we both loved it. I was more often than not running late, but she would always put her black book bag in the seat next to her. When I ran through the door at 7:48, she'd start to smile because I always had a Starbucks coffee cup in my hand.

The night before our 3<sup>rd</sup> test, we decided to study together at Starbucks. Her stress level was high because she wanted to finish the semester strong so she could keep her honors scholarship. I told her not to worry about it—she was as good as I was, and she would do fine. Danaea sat on one side of the table with her monster cookie and herbal tea, and I was on the other with my coffee and pumpkin loaf. We studied some that night, but mostly we ended up talking about our futures. She was about to go home—the first time that semester—for Easter break, but she felt weird about going back to Little Rock because so much had changed. All of our friends were either married or getting married, and she found it hard to connect with people. I could see the desire on her face to get married. She even said that night that she wanted to be a wife and mom before she died. I agreed, but I think almost every girl goes through that fear of never walking down the aisle, or holding her newborn baby.

We both took the test the next morning. After it was over, she found me waiting outside the classroom and told me she thought the test was pretty easy. When she died, one of the first things I wanted to know was how she did on her test. I guess I wanted to know if my studying with her helped. I wanted to know that she would have kept her scholarship. Danaea got a 98%, my teacher wrote in an e-mail the next week. Danaea was a grade behind me, but because of her strong desire to excel, she was scheduled to graduate a semester early.

After she died, Rogers saw the essence of Lee when everyone gathered to support them as a family. On the day of her funeral, a bus full of Lee students showed up to meet her parent—Roger and Terrie—along with some staff who knew Danaea well. I was overwhelmed by how many people she had influenced in a few short years. The close group of friends she had at Lee were all present, but their minds were wandering around in the past. A feeling of brokenness spread around the room as Terrie and Roger greeted each student. I just thanked them all for coming—I didn't know what else to say.

So many people came up to me that day who I hadn't seen in years. Most of them had worked at FamilyLife ministries with my parents, as well as Roger and Terrie. To be honest, I didn't have long conversations with any





of them. I had no idea what was new in their lives, but it didn't matter. I hope they understood. In those moments, I just wanted to hold on to every person and thing that had any connection with Danaea. When I hugged Terrie at the funeral, I could truly feel God's arms stretching around us too. As we stood there weeping on each other's shoulder, she said, "Hugging you, Missy, makes me feel like I'm hugging a piece of her." The silver coffin that lay a few feet behind us was the only thing that would envelop Danaea's body now. I don't remember when the last time I hugged her was. I guess those small gestures don't stick in your mind when you think you'll see that person next Tuesday in grammar class.

As I sat in the third row of folding chairs that faced the coffin, I couldn't help but wonder if she knew her college career would be cut short, that her life would be cut short. That she would be lying in a silver coffin, lid closed, with her family and friends holding wads of Kleenex in their clenched fists, mascara running down their cheeks. There was a general dampness in the air—a blue tent shielded us from the rain that fell on the gray stones that were set in neat rows around the cemetery. God promises to weep with those who weep, but I couldn't help but wonder how He could mourn because He got to be with her, and I didn't. He took her soul away after only twenty years and left her lifeless body for us to bury under the

earth. The moments I spent listening to the pastor read Danaea's favorite scripture verses and listening to him talk about her servant heart, I couldn't help but be angry at God for taking away one of my best friends.

My mind kept slipping in and out of reality as my eyes scanned the coffin. It became more and more blurred the longer I stared. I knew she was inside, but I couldn't quite grasp that seemingly simple concept. I kept trying to convince myself that she was in the coffin, and she was dead. I think shock prevented me from wrapping my heart around what my mind was shouting. I decided against going to the viewing the night before, and so far, I don't regret that. I knew it would probably help to bring closure, but I didn't want closure at the time. Her mom told me that she didn't look like herself—she was swollen, scraped, and bruised from being thrown out of her car. She had her seatbelt on, but the impact was too strong. Her neck was broken and her face chalky from all the make-up. That's not the Danaea I remembered or wanted to see.

Before the formal funeral at her church, the pastor conducted a graveside ceremony, which held only a few close friends. I used to live right down the street from the graveyard that Danaea's body lies in. It was here that I saw her coffin for the first and last time. They wanted to give close friends an opportunity to mourn. The funeral was intended to celebrate



her life; thus, her casket was not present at the church ceremony. A group of guys who worked at the coffee shop with us were dressed in suits and stood in a line on the edge of the tent. They were the pallbearers. Their hands were folded neatly one over the other, and they all bowed their heads as the pastor talked about Danaea's life. Roger came up behind me before the ceremony started and wrapped his arms tight around my chest. He whispered into my ear that Danaea loved me; my friendship meant the world to her; and other things that I have forgotten. The image of the coffin overwhelmed much of what happened that day.

People offered a lot of so-called encouragement through those few days I spent in Little Rock, which I know came from their hearts, but I realized then that sometimes it's better to be silent. One of my favorite lines was: "Well, at least we know she's in a better place." Yeah, okay, that's great, but that doesn't make the pain of losing her go away. On the opposite side, the most profound statement came from Terrie. She wrapped one arm tight around me and the other around my mom, pulling us close, and said, "Even though I miss her, I would never ask her to come back. Not now. Not after she's experienced life without suffering." I knew somewhere deep in my soul, I felt the same way, but it was overpowered with my own selfishness. The truth was I did want her back, but all I could do was cry and nod as



though I agreed.

Her parents decided to come down themselves after the funeral and bring her belongings back home. I went over to help, but I felt overwhelmed by all the people there. Besides Roger, Terrie, and Danaea's sister Loren, both sets of grandparents, Danaea's old roommate Julia, and Josh (a good friend of the family) were there. I stood in her apartment watching her grandparents and friends grab boxes and take them out to a large van they rented for the trip. Terrie, Danaea's mom, told me to pick out one of Danaea's many purses and take it with me—one that held special meaning for me, or reminded me of her.

She had an obsession with purses and wasn't afraid to admit it. I have this same obsession, which I'm more reluctant to admit. I chose one that I remember her carrying a lot, but also it was one that I liked because it had a kind of French design. We both liked things that looked Parisian or had the Eiffel Tower on them. She and her dad had plans to go to Paris someday. I told them I would be their tour guide and translator, putting my French to good use. Terrie found some Eiffel Tower stationary of Danaea's in her dorm room that she gave to me. She also sent me some jewelry of Danaea's that she thought I would like to wear. One of the necklaces, unbeknownst to Terrie, was made by me the pervious summer. It has a





silver flip flop charm in the middle—one of Danaea's other obsessions. I have not yet been able to wear any of the jewelry she sent. It still sits at the bottom of my beaded pink jewelry box in a red velvet bag, waiting for me to be ready.

I don't honestly know if you can ever be ready to pull your dead friend's necklace out of a bag and clasp it around your own neck. It makes death much more permanent and concrete. I have never been through the grieving process before, but, looking back on the past seven months, I can tell you that the denial stage lasts for a long time. Some days I forget and think that I see her walking down the steps of the Humanities Building. Then the girl turns her face towards me, and I realize she doesn't have the same nose or the mole on the right side of her chin. I can also tell you that there are days in-between the denial stage where reality hits you in the stomach, and there's no way of predicting when those days will hit. For me, it's been very sporadic. Writing this piece has forced me to focus on the very thing I've been trying to deny. Several times, I have stopped writing because I cannot push myself, physically or emotionally, any further.

In order to write, I have to relive walking out into the kitchen and seeing my dad's face drop as he held his cell phone on one ear. I have to remember what it felt like to stand there and listen to him say things like

"Oh no!" and know something's wrong, but have no clue what. I have to remember him walking slowly toward me, watery-eyed, saying very matter-of-factly, "I've got some really terrible news, ok?", and then proceeding to tell me that Danaea was killed on her way home last night. It was Good Friday, but after those words sunk in, it became Hell Friday.

I wanted to just let my knees give out in weakness, and let myself fall on the kitchen floor, but my dad wrapped his arms around my shaking body and held me up. He kept saying "I'm so sorry" and crying with me. My grandparents were there that weekend to spend Easter with us, but ended up watching in shock as my parents and I grieved.

After my dad got me stabilized, I wanted to know what happen, how she died. He said they think she fell asleep, but aren't sure. Somehow, though, she ended up on the opposite side of the highway and was hit by an on-coming car. "She was apparently hit hard enough that she flew through the windshield," he said. As I was trying to let my dad's words sink in past my ears, I realized that my mom was in the shower and still didn't know. I ran toward her room, saying "I have to tell Mom." It turned out that my mom was just getting out of the shower—not the best timing. At the time, though, I was only concerned about telling her the news. My mind was racing around in circles, and I had to let out some words so it wouldn't



overheat. Mom didn't take the news well, but no one would expect her to. She was close to Danaea too, and Terrie is one of her closest friends, so her immediate focus was on Terrie. She buried her face in her soft yellow towel and nearly screamed in pain, tears soaking into the towel. She tried to ask how it happened, but could barely push the words out.

I almost think her reaction was worse than mine initially because I was overcome by shock and immediately went into denial mode. We sat on her bed for a while and cried. It's hard to explain what kind of emotions fill your heart in those initial moments. I felt a lot of numbness and didn't know how to deal with it. I often found myself staring at the pattern on my mom's quilt, or a small trinket on the living room fireplace, my eyes going in and out of focus while tears began to well up behind my eyelids. My mom could see the pain in my eyes and kept telling me "I'm so sorry you have to deal with this, Missy."

My grandma assured us early on that she would watch the kids for a few days so my mom, dad, and I could all go to the funeral. I still don't think she fully realized how grateful I was that both of my parents could be there to support me, but I thanked her and hugged her hard, hoping she would comprehend a piece of the gratitude I felt. We spent the weekend gathering our clothing and emotions for the trip and waved goodbye to



Grandma, Grandpa, and the kids on Monday, the day after Easter.

For a reason I cannot yet explain, the majority of the six-hour drive to Little Rock has been completely washed out of my memory, except for a few brief moments. We had been told by a friend, Scott, that Danaea's accident site was in-between Jackson, Tennessee and Memphis, which are 1 hour and 26 minutes apart, according to Mapquest; thus, the likelihood of finding the specific spot (in the dark no less) was not very likely. Still, I looked intently out of the side window for tire tracks in the median.

The sky was particularly dark that night, but the constellations were unobstructed by clouds, which created a soft glow over the highway. After several minutes of searching and no success, I gave up and prayed that God would give me peace. I didn't feel any miraculous change occur, but I did hear a strong yet quiet voice ask me to look out at the patch of grass in the median one more time. Through the darkness I saw the tire tracks, deep and curved from one side of the median to the other. For most passersby, these parallel lines were ordinary and hardly anything to write at length about, but for me, they brought a sense of connection between my lost friend and me. This experience was the reality of Easter. The dynamic of the holiday changed last year, and honestly, I can't tell you one word of the sermon or any lines from the songs we sang in church, but I can confidently





say that I felt God's presence stronger than I had during any previous Easter.

Terrie told me that Easter held more meaning after Danaea's death than any previous Easter had; the resurrection carried tangible value that was previously just a concept that she believed. The reality of the resurrection for me was clouded by disbelief at the previous days' events—the fact of Danaea's death was still, for me, tied up in raw emotion. I stood through the worship service staring into the lights, every so often reaching up to my cheek and quickly wiping away tears. I was tired of receiving sympathy, so I tried to be as discreet as I could with red cheeks and hollow eyes. Questions still outweighed answers, which made me restless and wanting to be anywhere but in a church service celebrating God's faithfulness.

Several friends told me their stories of how God brought them closer to Him through tragic situations, which I think made me reject the assumption that I would do the same. I didn't want to just accept that Danaea's death was part of God's special plan, that He would turn my mourning to dancing, and that everything in life would become more meaningful because of my suffering. I felt an invisible pressure from no one in particular, but everyone in some way, to become a better and stronger Christian because of my loss. Because of my passive spiritual rebellion, my

relationship with God did suffer. I cannot look back at the past seven months and say that everything was made clear in light of my situation. God did, however, show me the extent of human selfishness.

The only thing I could focus on for the first few months was my self. I wanted Danaea back and I didn't want to negotiate that point. Even during her funeral where bulletins were handed out that read "In Celebration of the Life of Danaea Marie Cheuvront," my spirit rejected the celebration and replaced it with hurt and confusion. Some friends of mine and Danaea's made a video full of images from her life with a song by Steven Curtis Chapman about seeing a lost loved one again. It was a great song that I'm sure touched most of the people who came, but I wasn't ready to accept anything that had to do with joy.

I kept wishing she was watching it with us, but then I supposed we wouldn't be there if she was. Instead, she was replaced with pictures of her and Roger on the beach when she was two and her with friends from Lee at a Christmas party. The pictures seemed stagnant—her familiar smile was nearly identical in every picture, with a slight variation in the amount of teeth present. Pictures capture small moments in larger adventures, and somehow I felt like I wasn't seeing the whole truth that was contained in the bigger picture—it was impossible to capture in a lens, I knew, but I still



wanted more.

The truth I was searching for in her smile was in vain, but eventually surfaced in a song that promised God would bring beauty in the midst of pain. At first, the song only brought more memories of Danaea, which were followed by more pain, but eventually God's promise came to light in a moment and a place I would not have been able to predict—chapel. I always regarded chapel as a refresher in the midst of a hectic week, but something that doesn't carry much spiritual weight; however, several months after Danaea's death, I stood in chapel singing the words of familiar worship songs, zoning in and out, not taking the words as my own. However, when the worship team began to sing the words "thank you for the cross," God spoke into my heart. I rarely hear God's voice clearly, and when I do hear a voice, I often question its source.

This time, though, I didn't dare question it because of the power behind the words whispered into my mind—"Don't you see, Missy? The cross is the beauty you have been looking for. I am not going to bring beauty out of your pain because I already did 2000 years ago." Jesus enduring the pain of the whip and the nails allows us to avoid it now. Danaea is avoiding it now and will instead be living in pure beauty forever. My best friend, Shalla, wrote a note to me soon after Danaea died, and in it

she simply said, "Christ died so that we could live forever. That's what Danaea's doing. She's living forever." It was such a simple concept, yet so difficult to grasp.

I became obsessed with hearing different views from pastors and theologians on what happens immediately after a person dies. Most of them didn't give concrete answers, which took me around in circles and brought me around to the point I started from—uncertainty. I knew the verse in 1 Thessalonians that says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, and with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16 NIV), but I also heard that those believers who die are immediately brought into the presence of God. I could not reconcile these two aspects of life after death into one perfect whole. Did this verse mean the dead would remain in the ground until the day Christ returns and then be the first to rise? What about the concept of Abraham's bosom? I did not want to believe that Danaea is in the presence of God if she isn't. John Piper, in a section of *Desiring God*, suggests, "The biblical evidence is that our soul continues on after death and that we remain conscious in the intermediate state while awaiting our final destiny of resurrected existence in the new heavens and new earth." This theory seemed logical to me, but my heart





was still torn.

I have found comfort in the promise of Paul in Philippians 1:23, which says that being with Christ at death "is better by far" than living on this earth. Also, Jesus promises the thief hanging on the cross beside him that "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43 NIV, emphasis added). I still don't have a definite answer, but after talking through possibilities with my dad and reading excerpts from John Piper, I've realized that, regardless of where her soul is exactly, God is there also. She is experiencing His presence in some way, and that has to be more exciting and fulfilling than anything she experienced on earth.

I still have days where the image of the silver coffin and the memories of time spent on the beach or in grammar class still haunt me, but I have learned to expect those days and take each one as it comes. I have felt God's presence in the midst of those times, but I am still working through the pain that comes with loss. It comes easier now, though, because I can rest in the fact that the beauty of Christ's death has given Danaea a beauty that reflects God's holiness for eternity, which is something I will one day share with her.





Easy Peasy Japaneasy



David Pemberton



In the mountains of southern Colorado, there is a gap that makes sense of confusion. Being in the gap brings understanding to the times of doubt and comforts my heart to know it will not stay dark forever.

In between the day and night, everything is beautiful because of the light shed on it. The trees live out their majesty in the gap with the surroundings of all other elements of life. Colors that stretch the mind feed the wild fire through the mountains. Shapes that capture our imagination leave us wondering if we're dreaming. Life covers these mountains and teaches our minds that never again will a photograph be enough. Awe-inspired beauty hits these mountains, and for a glimpse of time, heaven floods the earth, building up, encouraging, growing, and loving creation for the night to come. After this short glimpse of perfect beauty comes the mix of dark and light, somewhere inbetween, where you cannot tell which is stronger, which one has the upper hand. This fog of little vision and clarity warps direction and purpose for life. It's the trees that were once so beautiful, distinct and revered, that have faded into colorless shapes plugged into the earth. The result of defeat is not to be settled yet because life can still come from within, but just as close is death, eagerly awaiting a victory. It's this middle ground that is so crucial for life: to press through to live or to surrender the battle that was never to be lost. This period must

rely on the previous period of time for life until the next day, until the light breathes life into creation.

Our pauses of beauty, and complete perfection in our lives will not last forever in this world. It's not about when the fog sets in, but how we respond. What do we focus on? Can we have strength to wait until the morning? If we choose to push through confusion, on our horizon, there is hope; there is life. It is there that light will shine through.





My fascination with the camera began when I was in high school. A compulsive hobby best describes my approach towards photography then. When I began using a camera, it served mainly as a way to amuse my friends with the so-called paparazzi shots. The primary output of my work was funny, random pictures and usually photos that could be stashed away in a randomly named folder of my hard drive and forgotten. Frankly, the highest value of a photo to me and most of my peers was as wallpaper on the computer's desktop. Now, I feel the camera is a way to express, to tell a story and to give the viewer something to think about. Once behind the camera, we all can be storytellers and each shot can hold a multitude of tales in its own right. Unfortunately, it required a drastic event to get me thinking about how people respond to photos.

The day was fairly ordinary and I was out on the streets taking some random shots. I had no particular objective apart from breaking away from the monotony of a particularly long vacation. Label it as a momentary lapse of reason, or an innocent mistake of a sixteen-year-old high school senior, but a parked police van caught my eye. I innocently pointed my digital camera at the blue vehicle and clicked on the camera's switch.

The events after the fateful clicking sound were a blur. Angry policemen converging around me, demands for identification and finally the

bottom line, "Do you not know what taking photos of the police means?" To be blunt, I didn't. The thirty minute 'interrogation' and a police ride to the nearest photo studio to format my camera's memory card had given me two big topics to think about. First of all, the social issues of my own country were much bigger and graver than what I had perceived it to be, and secondly, photos represented more than just funny faces and pretty flowers.

As the days went by, the thought came more vividly in my mind. What can photos represent? How much impact can they make in society? Apparently, it was quite a lot as I observed in the vitriolic response of the policemen. So much so that the government at that time had placed civic restrictions on public photography along with press freedom during the 'state of emergency' that had been enforced around the country. Immediately after his ascent to the throne, King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah began taking control of the political situation of the country. Eventually, the democratic monarchy was transformed into a modern-day absolute monarchy. In response to the Maoist insurgency escalating in the kingdom, the king's government, as the media termed it, had imposed a strict state of emergency which included huge media censorship.

And yet the images kept pouring in from newspapers, magazines, blogs and message boards. From riot police bashing protestors to hair-



raising images from the outcomes of civil war in the country, the media censorship was doing little to suppress the atrocities being performed by both the Maoists and the government itself. Eventually, people began questioning the legitimacy of the King's government that they had once welcomed. The final outcome was a public movement against the King's government which was not stymied even by the 'shoot-at-sight' curfew implemented around the nation. And through all the chaos, emotionally moving photos kept coming from both professional and amateur photographers, prompting the people to speak against the current government and restoring the democratic rule. These events intensified the spark that had begun in my mind. I believed that the camera was not just a hobby but something that inspired others, sparked thoughts, and most of all, evoked a sense of story and reaction for the viewers.

The implementation of this new realization into the way I took photos was not easy. Getting constructive feedback from people was hard work and sometimes even frustrating as I found myself explaining to others about what I thought of the photo. I wondered what was missing in my photos that made them hard to connect with others. The answer came to me when I stumbled upon a photo on the internet. It was a simple photo of two dogs peering through a gate, but in its simplicity, it showed me that I

had been trying too hard.

The core of photography is to feel, express and finally convey. The level of expertise is not a deciding factor. The chief goal to focus on is what one wants to convey through the photos. That special touch is achieved through incorporating one's point of view in the photos, be it as perspective, a different angle or in a way no one had thought of before. All the photos I saw during the curfew were special, for they presented an important social event through various perspectives, ranging from that of a participant to an observer. The photos that one sees in magazines and newspapers, they too are guided by the theme of the writings they are accompanying. An old park bench may seem mundane to many and beautiful to some; one must try to convey that sense of beauty into the photos they take. The same applies to any occasion and object, as long as one truly tries to convey one's emotions, no shot will seem like a wasted one.

Be it beggars who surround the sidewalks or the grand castles that reflect a nation's cultural heritage, all are potential subjects behind the viewfinder of the camera. But each individual has his own perception regarding any subject, and that perspective must be reflected in our pictures. The inclusion of this personal view is what makes one a photographer and not simply a cameraman. A sunset by the beach may be beautiful to look at,





but a child playing at the beach during the sunset... now that moment would be priceless.



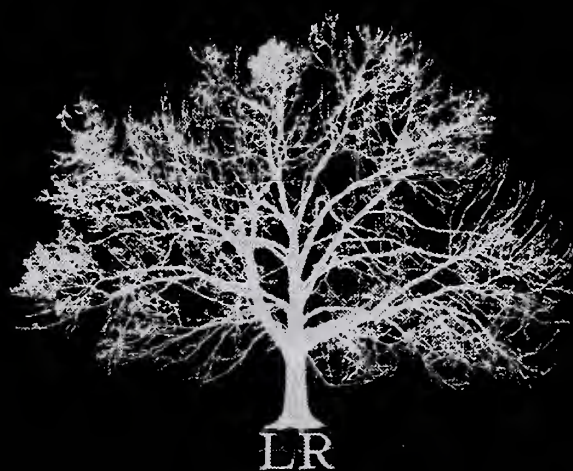


Here All the Bombs Fade Away

Leandra Webb



# SPIRITUAL QUEST



LR

I was six years old, and acting my age, as I rolled around on our living room floor one night, back down, my feet up on the seat cushions of our marigold velour couch. The couch sat in front of a large, single pane window framed in brown wood. During the day we could see our neighbor in her yard, sometimes staring into our lives, her little son running around her ankle ecstatically. But that night the drapes were pulled shut—outdated, satin green, embroidered. I don't know what brought up that word "saved" which I had heard in Children's Church frequently, but I suddenly shot up to a sitting position with the thought that I didn't really know what it meant to be "saved" and that I probably should know.

I hurried into the kitchen, my bare feet on the gold and burnt-brown carpet. Mom was cutting coupons at our kitchen table and looked up at me as I blurted, "How do you get saved?" I sat with my hands folded daintily on the plywood tabletop painted country blue and absorbed everything Mom was telling me. She opened her massive study Bible, its wafer-thin pages resting heavily on either side of the binding. I don't remember exactly what she said, but what I do remember is praying to Jesus with my heart wide open in the trust that He would forgive me from my sins and come live in my heart. Then He came—I felt it! I felt Something fill my heart—a warm, joyful feeling—like sunshine, only heavy and immense.





The next morning I woke up and did not feel the Feeling anymore. This bothered me until finally, while I was playing in our backyard, I plopped down to my knees at the bottom of our Little Tykes slide, resting my intertwined fingers on the warm, bright yellow plastic, and invited Jesus into my heart again. Nothing. I would later be taught at my church, "Once saved, always saved" and I came to the conclusion that I had gotten used to the feeling of Jesus inside me the same way I always got used to the smell of our neighbor's house after being in it for a while.

Cedar Hill Baptist is the name of the church which served as the catalyst for my moment of salvation and which continued to influence my growth as a young Christian. In my Sunday School class, I learned the famous Bible stories and watched as my teacher acted them out with felt-board cutouts. In Children's Church, which was led by the pastor's wife while her husband was preaching to the adults upstairs, I learned more Bible stories and trivia and I sang and marched along to songs like "Father Abraham" and "I'm in the Lord's Army (yes, sir!)." On Wednesday nights, I would compete with other kids in reciting the week's memory verse and in Bible "sword drills." Church was a big part of my life, but at that point, I didn't understand the concept of letting what you learn at church flow into the rest of your life.

Life at home was perhaps not that of the typical Baptist family. I discovered the world of reading and commenced in devouring book after book of The Boxcar Children and Nancy Drew. Always the drama queen, I would take an old war hat that we had found at the flea market and an umbrella and dance to Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" in the living room. We only had one small square of hardwood flooring (though I suspect it was probably just hard floor that looked like wood) which took its place of privilege at the front door and this is where I would pretend to tap dance in my shoes that made the most noise. I would get this feeling of embarrassment in my stomach when my parents would say things like, "Oh, how cute!" But I couldn't help myself—I was immersed in my imagination.

The older I got, the more entrenched I became in the legalism of what I was being taught at church. Without ever really thinking that I could have an option, I evolved into a fundamentalist. I only wore dresses and skirts. I only listened to hymns and classical music. I had decided on courtship instead of traditional dating and was reserving my first kiss for my wedding day. Of everyone in my family, I was the most whole-heartedly involved in fundamentalism.

My beliefs were so certain back then, my walk with God so measurable. It was this strange combination of spiritual certainty and



youthful sincerity. I would read Bible verses and keep a journal of how I could apply them to my life, writing things like,

The things that I have learned from reading the Bible and going to Church are from God. They are rules and daily life principles that I must follow in order to maintain a close and personal walk with God. But I shouldn't stop there. I John 3:22 says: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things pleasing in His sight." I must go above & beyond that which is required of me.

I qualified my relationship with God through the list of standards that I maintained—and if I wanted to get closer to God, I would simply tighten my standards. Instead of limiting myself to PG-rated movies, I would commit to watching only G-rated movies.

Every now and then, I would impose my standards on other people in my life. During middle school, my older sister Lindsey had started getting into Christian Contemporary Music. My friends at church would call it "CCM," with this look on their faces like it gave them a bad taste in their mouths. I remember Lindsey playing Steven Curtis Chapman's Speechless album and Jaci Velasquez' Crystal Clear and I would storm indignantly to her room and yell, "I don't want to hear that junk in this house!"

I would never have admitted it at the time, but one day I was riding

in the car with my mom and my sister, fuming in the backseat that my mom was letting Lindsey play Crystal Clear while I was present. There is a line in Velasquez' title-song which says to God, "If I could call You a color, You'd be the deepest of blues." To my surprise, the poetry of that line struck something in me and I fought back tears, hoping that Mom and Lindsey wouldn't notice.

Spiritual certainty and the sincerity of a young girl's wide-open heart. I wasn't living a cynical double life behind my facade of ankle-length skirts. This was the only way I knew God and I desired to please Him with everything that I was. I spent some of my most vulnerable moments in the backyard, shivering under my quilt and the star-flung winter sky. I would lie on my back until my toes went numb and I couldn't control the chattering of my teeth, and I would just watch God—the glimpses I could get of His glory seeping through the pinpoint holes of the dark veil above me. I would whisper to Him and believe that He was communicating back through every shooting star and rustle of leaves in the wind.

Night falls,  
And my dreams awaken  
As each star appears  
And forms the detail of my thoughts.





You come  
And meet me here  
While the quiet of the earth  
Surrounds me like harmony.

There's nothing between us but the sky.  
But what a veil  
With which You cover Your glory!  
Is this merely a taste?

How can I lie beneath  
The splendor of the Heavens,  
And then realize I've only reached  
The threshold of Your majesty?

But it's a good start.  
I'll hold my breath and wait for You to breathe.  
I'll close my eyes and imagine what can be.  
I'll open my heart and let You fill me once more,  
O Lover of my soul.

Can we meet tonight?

My parents made the decision to leave CHBC when I was thirteen, just as I was beginning high school. We started attending a three thousand member Presbyterian church closer to our house and my epiphanies about freedom in Christ packed into the following years created a lot of regret about the legalistic dogma to which I had subscribed. It was an awkward transition, though. I still refused to wear pants and so my growing passion

for basketball demanded that I wear an “athletic skirt” made of spandex, solid black with a white vertical stripe on either side.

One day, a group of our new friends was planning to attend a Chris Rice concert and my mom talked me into going. I went, but that didn’t keep me from judging everyone around me. I stood when everyone else stood, but my arms remained perfectly still at my sides while the crowd joyously clapped to the beat. I bristled as the girl next to me raised her hand in worship and all I could think about was what we had always said at my old church—that clapping and the raising of hands distracts from worship.

Then Chris Rice played the worship chorus “I Could Sing of Your Love Forever” and it happened again. I hated repetitious songs, but something about the reverberation of that line—the notion that God is worthy of it stretching out into eternity—slipped past my judgmental thoughts. This time I couldn’t contain my tears and I had to run to the bathroom to get my sobbing under control. The girl who had been next to me came to check on me.

“Ashley, are you alright?” she smiled gently as I stood in front of the mirror, trying to iron out my face.

But I was still too prideful to admit what had happened in my heart. “I’m fine,” I said, the words dry in my mouth.



When I finally started getting used to "life outside the Cedar Hill box," as my Dad called it, I was relieved to find that I wouldn't lose my closeness with God if I lightened up on some of my standards. CCM and pants slowly phased into my life and I felt as if I was able to actually draw closer to God with this new-found freedom. However, daily life without my standards was very intimidating and I remember being mentally paralyzed by the fear that I would somehow go too far in the other direction and lose all sense of morality. In my panic, I asked God what to do and for probably the second time in my life, I heard a "voice" in my heart: "Live your life to the fullest . . . for Me." I took that and ran with it. It wasn't as straightforward as my old rulebook, but it made sense and it meant growth in a way that I had never experienced it—out there on my own. I adopted Psalm 119:32 as my life verse: "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." I took comfort in the security expressed in the idea that there is still a path to follow, but I also loved that the journey can be one of freedom.

I ended up going to the same charismatic university as the girl who had stood next to me at the Chris Rice concert. I learned to dance before God and to work hard at school as worship. My senior year is now half-way over and once again I realize how unsure I have become in matters of faith. Though I was far from my fundamentalist roots when I entered college, I



still had a lot of firm beliefs which colored my world and influenced my decisions.

This semester I took two courses that challenged even those non-negotiable beliefs: Literary Criticism and a writing class called Religious Rhetoric and Spiritual Quest. I felt as though I was being bombarded with all of the hard questions at once—the questions I had never let myself consider. I was taking some theories with a grain of salt, like Derrida's deconstructionist "There is no absolute truth," but the accounts I read in my Spiritual Quest class showed me just how very differently people understand God. I chose a book to read and present to my class, *Fleeing Fundamentalism*, in which Carlene Cross examines the destructive effects of a black-and-white dogma. Cross raises a lot of questions about Biblical interpretation and conjectures that Christians turn Scripture like a "wax nose" to cater to what they already believe. If we truly followed every word of the Bible, she argues, we would still stone girls to death to punish them for being raped. How could God, even in the Old Testament, command such a heinous law? Then, for this class, we read a survivor's account of the Holocaust, and later one of the genocide in Rwanda. If God really is all-powerful, then why does he allow such revolting injustice to take place?



A paradox is tangling itself up in my life. When I read stories in the Bible of a violent God who mandates the slaughter of entire cities, I can't relate to that. At the same time, I can't stop loving God, trusting that His heart is good. Stepping outside of faith in the non-negotiables is just as vulnerable as was stepping outside of my legalistic standards. I have to go it alone, with only the abstract one-liners I suppose God is slipping me through my heart.

The cultivation of my relationship with God now, despite my nagging doubts, consists of trying to keep my heart in-tune with the poetry He imbues in the elements around me, calling me back to meet Him under the stars.

# Breathing Puzzle: Letting Go of the Relational Pieces

Aubrey Stout

When I dated James Whitehouse I spent a lot of time on the leather couch in the TV lounge of Davis Hall. At 2 AM I sat whispering, “I love you” into my greasy cell phone, never loud enough for James to hear. I would pad down the hall in baggy sweats with wet noodles of hair snaking down my back from my shower. Snuggled up on the sofa, huddled under blankets from my dorm room, I would attempt to connect with James across the time zone to Texas.

I wrote in my journal on September 15, 2005, “I miss James. I miss him even though I don’t know if he makes me come alive as much as the boy I might marry should make me come alive.” It wasn’t that I felt dead with James. I just felt doubtful. I met him after my freshman year, in the summer of 2005 at my parents’ church.

I was drawn to James because he was tanned and tall, with perfect, almost stiff posture, dark curling hair and blue eyes. His small mouth would twist into amused, shy smiles, yet he wasn’t shy, exactly. More soft-spoken. I grew used to the sound of his voice over that summer, when he would call to invite me to the church’s college group functions. We would talk for half an hour, maybe forty-five minutes, and I would get off the phone in giddy euphoria.

In the evenings I wasn’t with James, I would sit on my front porch





with my Dad, rocking and watching dusk steal over the Tennessee hills. I talked to both my parents endlessly about James, at every opportunity—on front porch rockers, living room sofas, in the car, or shopping at Wal-Mart. My parents were close with James's parents. Sometimes it felt a little too convenient, like an arranged marriage where the parents beam happily on the outskirts at their children in a budding, rosy relationship. Of course my parents weren't arranging our romance, but both sets—my mom and dad, and Mr. and Mrs. Whitehouse—were excited about the possibility of us making a match.

I wanted to include them, though. I wanted them to be on the inside, giving me advice about what to do, how to act, whether James and I would be right for each other. A month after going back to school, he finally told me that he liked me. I was on the verge of asking him if he liked me, because I was sick of waiting for him to make a move. We had been talking almost every night, and still, no direct admonition of feelings.

We wanted to do our relationship the right way, though. Both of us had read an arsenal of books on how a boy and a girl should engage in dating, or not dating. The general of this literary army was the ever-classic *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, by Josh Harris. My sister Amanda and I argued about whether it was appropriate to kiss your significant other—if you had

one, which neither of us did—before you married him. Josh Harris and his now-wife shared their first kiss at the altar. Amanda decided she wanted to wait until she was engaged to kiss, which I felt revealed a loose and potentially immoral character.

James and I never kissed during the fleeting summer we were together, then he was in Texas, and I in Tennessee. I grew frustrated with him over the phone, because he wasn't eloquent enough. I didn't want to date a master rhetorician, necessarily, but at least a guy who could engage me in stimulating conversation, who responded to my rambling narrations with more than a "cool," or, "yeah, I know." Often I grew morose over whether we "fit" together, like giant pieces of a breathing puzzle, forcing the little tabs into the spaces until they bent and curled at the edges.

Maybe James and I weren't right for each other because we didn't have sufficiently interesting conversation. But there were spaces in between the words we spoke that felt frighteningly empty. My dissatisfaction with our relationship lay not only in our conversation but also in our silences. When the pauses grew too long I grew frantic, willing him to say something, anything. Often I had to reach out and crack the silence like ice over a puddle.

James was attending LeTourneau University, studying missionary



aviation so he could be a pilot in Kenya. I wanted to travel to all the world's nooks and crannies, so Kenya wasn't objectionable to me, but I felt apprehensive of attaching myself parasitically to James's dream of missionary work. I wanted to write my way through the world, traveling to Prague and learning French and writing novels and memoirs, maybe working as a travel writer, maybe getting freelance work for Harpers or The New Yorker. With no practical plan to achieve these dreams, I feared getting lost behind the determined blueprint James had laid out for his life, doomed to be a meek Missionary Wife with a baby on the hip.

"Do you think our personalities fit?" I queried anxiously one night. "We're both kind of...I don't know...quiet. Do you think that works together?"

"Yeah. I mean, I think we go well together," James answered in his maddeningly matter-of-fact way. I refused to believe him, and continued to doubt and ask whomever I could if they could picture James and I working out. I was desperate for someone to legitimize us, to stamp "RELATIONSHIP APPROVED" across us like a passport stamp. Then we'd be free to move forward, to get married or at least call each other "boyfriend" and "girlfriend," titles we shied away from, probably a hang up we'd acquired from kissing dating goodbye back in high school.



A few days after my nineteenth birthday, James wrote me on Instant Messenger.

"We need to talk," it ominously read. I knew it was code for, "we need to talk about something pertaining to our relationship, quite possibly involving the termination thereof." My heart was racing as I left my dorm room, clutching my cell phone and waiting for it to ring. I walked down the hall, entering the TV lounge with trepidation. I assumed my position on the black leather sofa, preparing for the onslaught.

"I've been praying a lot and I'm not sure about our relationship. I think we need to step back," James ventured timidly. His voice pierced me underneath its camouflage of soft uncertainty. I felt tears spring to my eyes almost immediately as I countered calmly, "Okay. Why do you feel that way?"

"I don't know. We go to school so far away, and I feel like God is telling me to talk to you about this. I've been thinking about it for awhile, but I didn't want to tell you on your birthday."

"Would you still want to step back even if we went to the same school?" I asked skeptically, cursing my tears, throwing silent profanities at them like stones.

"Yeah. Probably."



“So why do you want to step back, if it’s not the distance?” I queried, trying to suppress a demanding edge to my voice.

He said he sensed reluctance on my part to participate in his calling to ministry in Africa. But I sensed that underneath all his reasons was a crushing truth: he didn’t like me enough to want to be with me. I felt like a painting on display in a gallery, watching James stand before me, scrutinize me, study my face intently, and then turn away.

We prayed on the phone, and he must have heard the tremor in my voice, the tears lurking at the perimeter, waiting to ambush me when I was safely off the phone. I hung up and sobs burst out of me like bombs, with heavy abandon. I called my mom even though it was well after 1 AM, and I knew she had been sleeping long ago. I felt curiously free, yet weighed down with emptiness.

I woke from my dreams of James feeling alone and empty, because he was gone from the space I had carved for him. But when I was with him, I felt empty too because he didn’t fit the space comfortably. I left behind the loneliness of being with James, of being with a boy whom I couldn’t cram into my life, to the freeing loneliness of letting go of shaky sandcastle romance.

Junior year came and I applied for the spring semester in Cambridge.

None of my close friends were going, but I felt a desperate, surging joy at the prospect of two and a half months in the United Kingdom and Europe. At last I could see cities like Paris and Florence and Barcelona, and revisit cities I loved, like London and Edinburgh.

Standing in the dark outside a friend's house in a throng of strangers, I recognized Ian Daniels, a skinny boy with a red beard and a quietly intense gaze. He had been in a Russian History course I took sophomore year. We struck up the standard, Hey, I think you were in my class, yeah, you were, well I'm Aubrey, it's nice to meet you officially. I found out he had applied to Cambridge.

"Will you be my Cambridge friend?" I asked impulsively. "I don't know that many people who are going."

"Yeah, I'll be your Cambridge friend," he replied, standing across the yard from me in his black leather jacket and skinny jeans.

A month and a half later I was at Café Mi Aroma, hunched over an American Lit textbook reading Poe. I saw Ian in my peripheral vision and waited for him to come over. He ambled up and looked over my shoulder.

"What are you reading?"

"'The Raven.' You know it?"

"Mmhmm."





He sat down at a nearby armchair, and I moved to an adjoining sofa.

"I'm gonna sit here cause my chair is really uncomfortable," I informed him, grateful for my decision to wear my cotton purple mini-dress over skinny jeans and a black turtleneck sweater. With my short choppy bangs, I looked stylish enough, I hoped, for Ian Daniels.

"So where are we going to go on Independent Travel?" he asked brazenly, as if it was a given that we would go in the same group. On Independent Travel, the larger group of Cambridge students splits into groups of four or five, and travel through Europe on their own. I had hoped to go with Ian ever since our first few trip meetings, because he looked at me like he knew me already. I could picture us traipsing through Paris on a rainy afternoon, or sitting side by side on a night train to Barcelona. I knew I wouldn't be able to escape from Cambridge unscathed. I was going to like this boy, whether I wanted to or not.

During Christmas Break, Amanda called my cell phone for a boy update.

"Has Ian called you?" she wanted to know.

"No. We've only hung out a few times. He's not going to call me over break."

Three days later he called. We talked for an hour about Cambridge

and Independent Travel. He insisted we go to Norway to see the Northern Lights, and fjords.

We came back to school early, right after New Year's. Our Cambridge classes started January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Ian called me five times as I drove from Bristol to Cleveland in the frigid night. I was antsy with anticipation over seeing him again. I drove to my apartment and jumped on my housemate's bike, so Ian would have to drive me back. He wouldn't want me riding back alone at 3 am.

I flew down the deserted streets, the wind stinging my hands and ears, and numbing my feet in their battered Rainbow sandals. The fur-lined hood of my new coat kept blowing off my head. I pedaled faster. I was going to Cambridge in two weeks, and I was going with Ian. Flying through the frigid night on my bicycle, I felt I would explode with joy.

Class was from eight-thirty until three every day until we left for Cambridge. Ian and I sat beside each other, writing notes and whispering. In the afternoons we went our separate directions—Ian to his apartment, me to my temporary room in Simmons Hall. Evenings were spent at his apartment, listening to Peter and the Wolf or Jens Lekman, and reading William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience aloud, critiquing each other's essays for our British Lit class.



One night we jumped in his car.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I don't know. Let's create mayhem," Ian suggested.

"Have you ever climbed the Cleveland Summit?" I asked.

"No."

"Well, I have. I think we should do it. It's pretty easy to get up there, but it's kind of a rush cause the fire escape is so high."

Ian parked the car and we jumped out, walking through the mostly empty streets of downtown Cleveland. Creeping past the entrance of the housing project, we scrambled over a wall and pulled ourselves up onto the fire escape. We began the rickety climb to the top. The streets grew smaller, and the buildings were laid out in patchwork precision. We heard sirens and shrank back against the walls, watching blue and red lights wail and weave through the streets to the scene of some graver crime.

Once on the roof, Ian began to photograph the lights and cars below. He was always carrying his Canon around. He took pictures of me, then set the timer and took pictures of us both. I watched him squint into the lens and aim it at the ground ten stories below. His dark brown hair was mottled with red and black, and spiked in disarray three inches off his head. I wondered if he would kiss me. The night was mild and a breeze was



blowing. We climbed back down the fire escape and drove to Starbucks just before it closed.

Cambridge was drawing closer. Five days before we left, we were snuggled together on his couch. Thank You For Smoking was playing in the background, but we weren't watching it anymore. Ian's face was inches from my own, and I could make out his eyes in the flickering light of the television. He had the most beautiful eyes. They were sea green with yellow sunbursts around his pupils.

"Are you going to kiss me?" I asked.

"I don't know. I want to," he whispered.

Later he would tell me how much my question caught him off guard. "Of course I couldn't kiss you then!" he exclaimed afterwards. "How could I?"

"I just wanted to know!" I'd argue. "There we were, just looking at each other, inches apart, so it seemed like you might kiss me. I just thought I'd ask."

I kept quiet the next night, and he did kiss me then.

"When are we going to make this official?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked coyly, stupidly.

"I mean...I want you to be my girlfriend."



"You dooooo?" I squealed. I didn't mean to. "I don't know. I mean, I want to be your girlfriend. I just...I mean, this is kind of crazy, right? We've only been hanging out like two weeks."

We agreed to wait a few days and think through the ramifications. I called my parents and told them. My dad thought we should wait until after the trip was over.

"Aubrey, I just think the trip will provide a good context to get to know Ian better, and then, when it's over, if you still want to pursue the relationship, you can."

My mom agreed, but she also told me she wouldn't be disappointed if I chose to date Ian right away.

I felt myself pulled back in time to the James days, trying to figure out the right thing to do, asking my parents for advice. Still, it was different this time. Everything with Ian escalated so quickly, I barely had time to reflect on it myself. Suddenly we were kissing and considering a relationship, all before embarking on the adventure of our college careers in Cambridge. With James every step was examined, from disclosing our feelings, to whether he was my real-live boyfriend, to whether we fit each other at all. All of this agonizing wonderment played out over the span of a summer and most of a semester. With Ian, I found myself swept up to the brink of a

relational cliff, unsure of whether to take the leap, after a few phone calls over Christmas break and two weeks of homework and movies and scaling buildings.

The night before Cambridge we agreed to make it official, meaning it went up on Facebook before God and all our Facebook friends. I felt like maybe my dad was right; maybe it would be wise to wait. What if we broke up in Cambridge? It was a gamble to start dating right before leaving on a semester-long trip in England, where we'd have no way of escaping each other if things didn't work out.

Cambridge was a whirlwind, both for our relationship and because of the sheer adventure of it. Living in the quaint town with its colleges and greens and daffodils was a dream come true, and I was living it with a new boyfriend at my side. I was falling fast for him. Really fast. He told me he loved me five days after being in Cambridge. I said it back, even though I felt like both of us were insane.

"I feel like Cambridge is a microwave for our relationship," Ian said one day as we were walking arm in arm along the Cam River. Jesus Green lay to our right, sprawling flat and crisscrossed with paths lined with great, draping trees. "It speeds everything up, because we're together so much."

We knew reality would hit once we returned to the States and





to normalcy. The microwave stage would be over, and there would be a summer spent mostly apart, then school would start again and classes and work and stress would weigh down on us. But in Cambridge, while we still lived real life a real place, there was a dreamlike quality to the months we spent there.

One night we were both up until 3 am writing English Lit. papers we had to submit by email to Dr. Rogers before leaving for Edinburgh in the morning. Ian had finally finished his and I was wrapping up mine. He said goodnight and headed back to his room. Suddenly he reappeared in my doorway, and bounded over to my bed, careful not to wake my sleeping roommate.

"Come look! Come look! It's snowing!" he whispered ecstatically.

We darted through the dark hallway and peered out the glass front door. Snow was swirling thickly down, feathery flakes like huge moths illuminated by the streetlight. We looked at each other bright-eyed.

"Get your coat," Ian ordered. "Let's go outside!"

Five minutes later we were outside in the snow. It wasn't falling as thickly, but there were two inches piled up on the brick ledge around the Hamilton and coating the sidewalk. I scraped out a snowman on the ledge, looking for twigs for arms. Our voices were hushed in the deserted street.

"Let's stay out all night," Ian said. It was already four in the morning, and we had to leave for Edinburgh by eight-thirty.

"Why not," I agreed. "Let's go into town and walk around until shops open, and then get breakfast somewhere."

We walked through the empty streets, past dark pastry shops and tearooms and clothing boutiques. We paused in front of the round chapel, and Ian photographed me framed in the doorway, with the snow all around. It didn't turn out because of the dark. We walked to the market, which in the daytime overflowed with fruits, veg, as the British called it, candy, bread, books, jewelry, handmade scarves, fresh flowers. Now the stalls were empty and wreathed with melting snow.

"I'm exhausted," I murmured, leaning into Ian in the shelter of the Marks & Spencer's doorway. "I don't think anything's going to open for at least another hour."

"Let's just walk back," Ian said.

So we walked hand in hand back to the Hamilton and a hot breakfast of eggs and cheese-on-toast.

Sometimes doubt beat within me like a drum, as it had with James Whitehouse. Even walking over the bridge one mild spring evening after Spanish tapas for dinner, as Ian wrapped his arms around me and



whispered, "I

love you," against my ear, I doubted.

"Is this really it?" I wondered silently, locked in Ian's embrace. "Am I in love with Ian? I know I care deeply for him. But is he the love of my life?"

The same doubts crept in periodically, and we dealt with them as they came.

"Sometimes I think we didn't do things the right way," I said regretfully.

"What do you mean by 'right way'?" Ian asked. "There is no right way. It's you and me, and we're in this relationship, learning and figuring it out as we go." He pushed a piece of hair out of my eyes. He liked my hair better curly. I always felt more polished with a gleaming curtain of hair I spent thirty minutes straightening, but Ian complimented me when my hair was naturally askew, a brown curly tangle of an angled bob.

I looked at Ian, leaning against the counter of the Hamilton annex. His hair was falling on his forehead, not trendy and spiked like usual. A mottled red-and-black beard was spreading across his jaw. He was fixing a turkey sandwich, lavishly frosting the bread with mayonnaise. I crossed the distance to him and leaned against his back, looping my arms underneath



his armpits. I felt his strong, skinny shoulders and nuzzled my face into his neck.

I wanted to choose to love him, despite doubt and deviation from my prescribed plans. I wanted to release “right way” notions and let us be the way we were—stumbling forward into a future of uncertain dreams, holding nothing but Ian’s hand. Knowing I didn’t have to push at the puzzle pieces, because neither Ian nor I were pieces of a puzzle, just a skinny theology major with green, sunny eyes and a brown-eyed girl in love with words, in love with each other, wanting to stay in the mess and beauty of each other’s lives.



## Spiritual Quest Essay Honorable Mentions

Nathanael Brouhard

"My Spiritual Journey Thus Far"

Danielle Metcalf

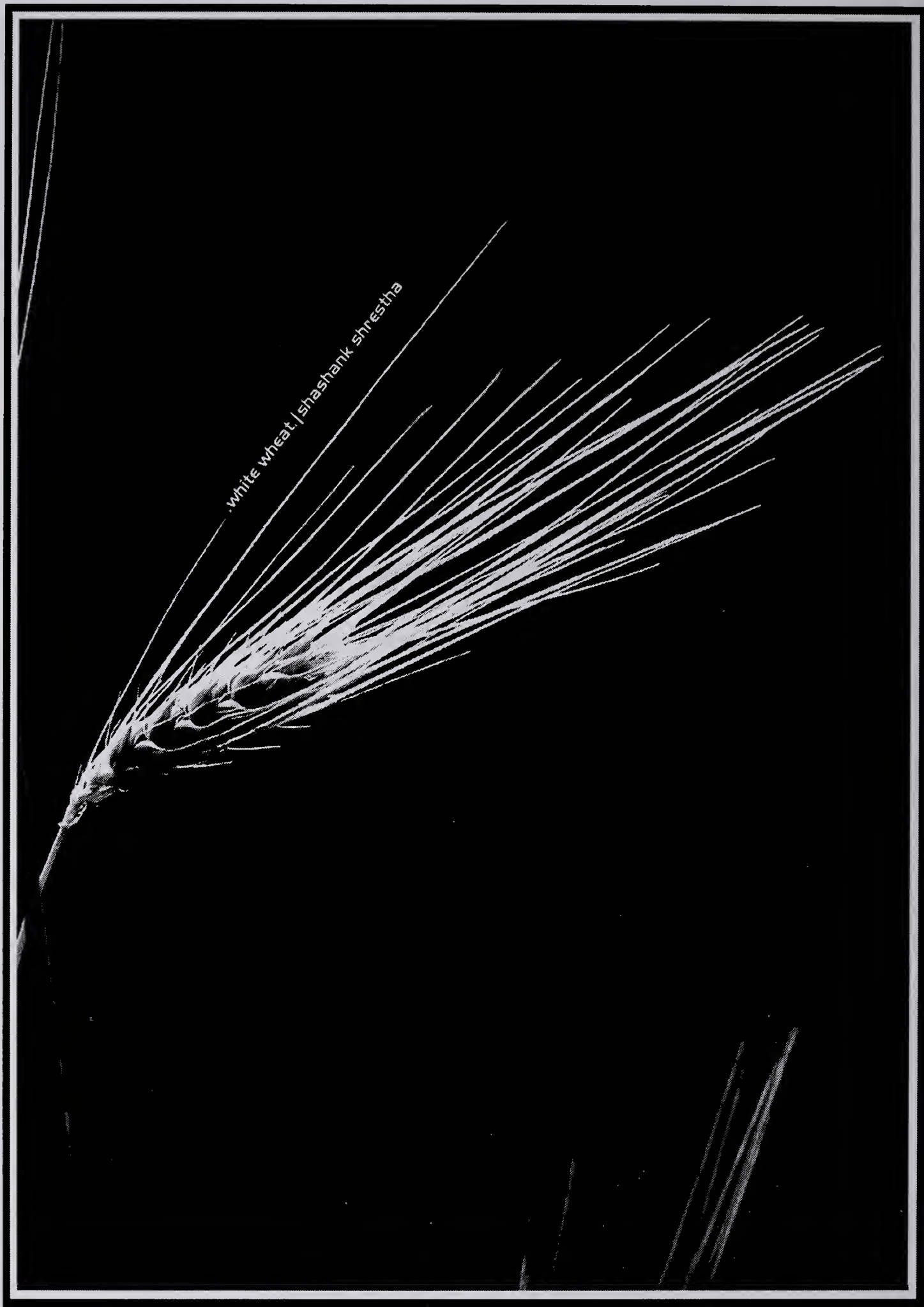
"Eyes to See"

Nika Puffe

"The Breathings of My Heart"

Heidi Monroe

"Little Orphan Ricky"



White Wheat

Shashank Shrestha





# INTERVIEW



Katie Chaple, a visiting poet from West Georgia University, came to Lee from March 17-19 as the final writer for our Writers Series. She has a BA and an MA from Emory University and an MFA and a PhD from Georgia State University in poetry. She also has experience in editing and has been published in many journals including Crab Orchard Review, Southern Humanities Review, The Texas Review, The Chatahoochee Review, and The Bellevue Literary Review. This interview was conducted via email during the spring semester.

Jon Tully: Will you let the readers know a little bit about your educational background?

Katie Chaple: I have a lot of degrees. I discovered how much I liked academic work and how much I disliked data entry, so I started at Emory, where I got two degrees—BA and MA. I was really interested in Victorian literature, and my Masters thesis is on Wilkie Collins—he wrote detective fiction, essentially. I then worked for about a year and realized that an office where people went to lotsofbirthdayluncheonsandhadafter-workbowling parties was not for me. I applied to Georgia State University and collected a



couple of degrees there as well—an MFA and a PhD, both in poetry.

JT: How did you get involved in editing? Is it something you enjoy? Would you recommend the editing world to any particular type of student or are there certain criteria you see as essential to succeed in that field?

KC: I love editing. I find its details and demands exhilarating, a rather bizarre statement, I suppose. I started editing like everyone does—with my own work. Once I got into a workshop situation, I was able to expand that to others', in a way. Workshop is a kind of beginning editing—not to say that all your suggestions are good or will be taken, just that you start trying out your abilities to see, your vision, really. Eventually your vision improves, both for the big picture and the line-by-line, word-by-word type. I don't think that there's a particular "type of student" I could point to, but I'd say that you have to be detail-oriented at the base of it. It takes dedication.

The first serious editing work I did was at Georgia State, where I was the poetry editor for the GSU Review, then I was editor for a while. You need clear goals, and you have to understand your own aesthetic and then be able to transcend that aesthetic and the prejudices that go along with it.



I didn't always like what I published, but I did understand that certain poems and stories were great—I just didn't care for how the greatness was accomplished. Eventually, I think, though, that your tastes expand, and you adapt. I've worked for many journals in many different capacities, and I think that's a good thing. I've run errands and kept the books and read workandcopyeditedandproofreadandrejectedmanuscriptsandaccepted manuscripts—all of these different jobs and experiences help me be a better editor.

JT: How have different people reacted in the past when you told them you were a writer? How did you handle their reactions and how did you incorporate them into the writer you are now?

KC: I don't think other people are as uncomfortable by my being a writer as I am by announcing it. Why is this? I don't know, possibly the worry that I may be asked to listen to stories that I simply must turn into poems or stories, but I think there's more to it than that. Most writing, or good writing, while public, is essentially a private act (though it becomes public rather quickly in a myriad of ways—peers, workshop, collaborations, etc.), so I'm a bit protective of the act and the title. Also, I think to announce



oneself a writer feels presumptuous—now, Eliot was a writer, Dickens was a writer, Plath and Dickinson and Bishop and the Brontës—those were writers. That said, you also have to have a certain confidence to try to write, particularly if your head is crowded with books like *Life Studies* and *Jane Eyre* and *Geography III* and *Ariel* and *The Hard Hours* and *Moby Dick* (and on and on until you feel like you need to lie down with the covers over your head)—so ultimately, you have to forget them all. You can't think about all that—it is debilitating.

JT: Speaking as a writer, what was the biggest contributing factor that drew you to writing? Once there, what has kept you writing? Did you ever have any stumbling blocks or bad experiences that almost deterred you from writing?

KC: My background drew me into writing. I've always admired those writers whose childhoods were not filled with novels and poetry because it seems like a more noble and honest love. It was just kind of a natural choice for me. As a kid, I had access to all kinds of lit. The house was filled with books—there were books in every room, and I was always going to the library. My parents were the kind that were constantly reading and

constantly reading to me. They also had a kind of reverence for authors, so I guess I got caught up in the romance.

In terms of the writing part—like most writers, I started writing as a kid, little stories and stuff. I got more serious when I was in high school and in undergrad. I had a great creative writing instructor at Emory, Geoff Becker, who steered me into poetry, and I won the undergrad poetry award there at Emory, so that kept me in it. Like most people, you have to have enough successes to ignore the setbacks. In grad school, I watched many of my fellow students get discouraged and quit, or those who did end up with a degree just stop writing when they didn't have the feedback of a workshop. Writing is hard, and I don't like it. I'm just pig-headed. I don't like giving up, so setbacks, for me, often work better than successes (though, don't get me wrong, I need those too). All those little failures tick me off, so I just try that much harder.

JT: Most prolific authors have a method or routine that they follow to help them in their writing process. Do you have a particular activity that you do in order to stimulate creativity? Is there a certain method you would recommend to aspiring writers?



KC: This idea of process is something that interests me immensely. And let's just put one thing to rest, I am not prolific—farthest thing from it. I don't have a routine—as hard as I try, I just can't establish one. I can tell you what I do to generate ideas. I read—that's a big one for me and most writers. There's something to the concentration and quietness it takes to read that helps me generate ideas for poems, and I don't just read poetry. I'm a huge fan of novels and short fiction—almost anything, really. I also pick up ideas from the news and from film. I have this poem called "Charlie Chaplin Enters a Charlie Chaplin Look-alike Contest." That poem stems from a scene in a movie called Lucky Number Slevin. Bruce Willis's character, a hitman, is telling a story about Chaplin coming in third at this contest, and the poem came from that. I also have poems that come from historical research—I have a couple of plague poems. I love NPR news—they have really interesting and quirky stories that sometimes grab me. I guess my advice would be not to discount anything as a possibility. Also, I'd say that there is no one method of composition—you have to find your own, and then to undercut that a bit: don't get too superstitious about your own process; that's dangerous. You don't have to have red Kool-aid or a green dinosaur pencil to write your story.



JT: Okay, time for the obligatory question: what are some of your strongest literary influences? How have those authors had a visible impact on your writing?

KC: I don't know that I have "influences" so-to-speak, but I definitely have literary crushes. Mostly I spend my time wishing that I could write like that person over there or this one here. The first poet (at least contemporary poet) that I fell in love with was Elizabeth Bishop. I love John Donne, Richard Wilbur, Andrew Hudgins, Frank Stanford, Sylvia Plath, James Dickey, Marianne Moore—all these writers (and countless others) have influenced the way I understand, and therefore, the way I write poetry. I'd studied poetry the way most people do—here and there with teachers who didn't like it or get it, so neither did I. It wasn't that I hadn't read poetry before—I took grad classes with living, breathing poets—it was just that I hadn't read poetry, if you understand my meaning. Poetry was mysterious and didn't make a whole lot of sense most of the time. Many poems also, through previous teachers, seemingly could be reduced to a single aphoristic meaning, ho hum. Probably the most famous example would be Frost's "The Road Not Taken," which is taught reductively, and which is, subsequently, used in advertisements and greeting cards. The



poem of the advertisement is this exquisite poem of inspiration, of having chosen a harder, more challenging, yet more rewarding path. The poem is much more complex. In graduate school, I discovered that and I also discovered a kind of paradox about reading poetry—that it is, at once, more complex and simpler than I'd been led to believe. Reading a poem isn't difficult—generally they have sentences, and you have to recognize multiple layers of “punctuation”—the line break and the comma, etc., and you have to know the meanings of the words, but there you have it—a situation that you can understand. It is in looking at how all the elements work together and how all the layers of meaning coalesce that's the hard part. I kind of think of that hard part as being like trying to hold a bunch of numbers in your head at once (and I'm sure that this is a personal metaphor and tells you quite a lot about me and math)—just when you think you have them all, there's another one slipping just past.

JT: What do you see as the purpose of writing? Is it a “spontaneous overflow of emotion reflected in tranquility” that serves a merely cathartic function, is it a means for social change, or is it somewhere in between? Where do you see yourself on that continuum?

KC: Currently I'm teaching a class on creativity, the second installment of a kind of year-long course regarding the purpose of writing that asks questions about craft versus inspiration, as well as takes up Abrams' model for criticism found in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, so I'm in the middle of this "debate" right now with several freshmen at the University of West Georgia. I don't know if I truly believe it is a deliberate choice: "Now, I shall sit down and write for social change." I know that poets themselves view writing in a myriad of ways and as having a myriad of functions—Sexton saw it as catharsis, Wordsworth as "overflow" and on and on. Did they just see it in one light? I find that hard to fathom. I think writers try to explain that which cannot be explained, including how all this stuff happens and what it all means. I don't believe that writing has one sole purpose, not even for the writer. In my experience, it may start as catharsis, or I may be provoked into a poem, but if it is going to be any good, I find that it needs to be more than that. The term "cathartic" seems to me to be reminiscent of the idea of inspiration—that a poet is struck and then writes—taken over by forces beyond his/her control; whereas Wordsworth's phrase takes into account both inspiration and craft—I'm more comfortable with that conception, that it takes both. The other idea that "cathartic" implies is that of confessional, the personal, and I don't think that good poems can only be "personal"—



that there must be some “public” or “universal” element to it. There must be a connection with someone else, that someone, somewhere must be moved by the work.

JT: With the de-emphasis that our culture places on written expression, what do you see as the future of poetry? As an adaptable art form, how will it mold to fit our current media-crazed society?

KC: I do worry about the form, but ultimately, I look at the numbers of people writing, and attending conferences and writing programs, all of which are increasing. All this participation and interest can't mean nothing. I think that our field has so many great, innovative, brilliant minds that are bent to this task, that create projects like Poetry Out Loud and that want to inspire and draw audiences that I feel very optimistic about poetry. In terms of molding, I don't know—I think that the concept of “molding” is antithetical to poetry, but will it expand, adapt? Yes—hasn't it taken up contemporary subject matter? Don't we see poems about things such as Spiderman and computers? It goes beyond subject matter to form as well—people are doing amazing things with poetry—take a look at Eric Elshtain's Gnoetry, look at the language poetry movement.



I think what we need is for all writers to also be readers. It seems a fundamental concept, but I cannot tell you how many people fancy themselves writers who don't read. Isn't it ironic that these people have something that they want to say and want people to read, that they want to add their voices, but they don't know what anyone else is saying?

JT: Finally, the much-anticipated crux of any interview: do you have any advice for up-and-coming authors? How can they learn from your experience?

KC: Read. Write. And continue to do both.



# Charlie Chaplin Enters a Charlie Chaplin Look-alike Contest

Katie Chaple

And comes in third.

How nice to have confirmed something which you already know:

there are two others—but that is only here, in Monte Carlo.

Who knows about other cities: Warsaw, Lima, Darjeeling?

You will never meet all these who better tipple

down the street, whose eyes are larger, mournful.

That these others could grip and project

your fear of the orphanage, dead father,

soprano mother's asylum voice strained to madness

delights you—it is all a joke, these props: the bowler, bamboo

cane, toothbrush mustache.

The judges and crowd laugh

and laugh, some doubling over, and from the wings,

you understand laughter borders on tears. How nice to understand

that you are not the most yourself. As you wander through

this funhouse of mirrors, you realize the contestants

aren't in disguise at all but your selves, each a reel of stories you film

in your head in Technicolor, in jingle and hum, in a plunge

of clatter and echo—all selves moving, pantomiming the pantomime.

\*Originally appeared in Passages North

—TheremainsofwhowasthoughttobetheRenaissancepoetFrancescoPetrarchare instead those of two different people, DNA tests have confirmed.

The skull was unexpected, a surprise in the pink marble tomb.

In 1873, the old doctor of Padua claimed it had crumbled,  
as though too injured to live outside that stone room.

Did he keep it on his desk? On his shelf as a specimen,  
an exemplar of perfection, the knitted plates  
a symbol of all that we cannot know of love?

The doctor was not the only man who needed—a friar fled  
his flagged cell, hacked off the poet's arm, spirited it back,  
a drunk friar in such grief for the world, so moved  
as to steal the physical. And where and how to keep it—  
this limb that had once moved to love's measure?

And now, these scientists with their test tubes, their milliliters  
and tweezers are used to wounds and hairs, blood  
and shatter. In their white coats and labs, they don't ask  
questions they don't know the answers to. They brush  
away quarry dust, measure the circumference, count the alleles,



and approximate the years—all equating female.  
Nobody asks: Whose body was not loved enough  
that her skull could travel like a pebble,  
could be used to punctuate the line of a man's body?

\*Originally appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*.



## Contributors' Notes

### Chandra Berry

Chandra Berry is a 3rd year Advertising major. She's a 20-year-old from Sevierville, TN. After graduating from Lee, she plans on opening a gallery/studio in Gatlinburg, TN, featuring her nature photography of the Smokies.

### Nikki Branam

Nikki Branam is a senior English major who is particular about the time in which she listens to Band of Horses. She doesn't want to feel downtrodden. She likes to cook and probably has more culinary skill in her left thumb than you do in your entire body. She also is a huge fan of curry, but not of eggplant curry. Don't be mistaken. Eggplant is an evil vegetable.

### Brandon Brown

Brandon Brown is a recent graduate of Lee University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Bible & Theology and a minor in Sociology. Currently, he is teaching Bible and History at a Christian school in South Korea. Don't take hugs for granted.

### Kevin Brown

Kevin Brown is an Assistant Professor of English at Lee University, where he writes in his free time. He has published poems and articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Academe*, *Jeopardy*, *Pinyon*, and *The Pacific Review*, among other journals.

### Matthew Chalcraft

Mathew Chalcraft is an English Major at Lee University, and in his free time, he enjoys reading and writing fiction.

### Missy Colter

Missy Colter is a senior English Writing major at Lee, and a member of the Lee Review editorial staff. After graduation in May, she plans to move



## Contributors' Notes

back home to Nashville, TN and pursue a career in publishing. Her passion and calling is to impact people through her writing.

### Jordan Davis

Jordan Davis is a freshman English major with an Intercultural Studies Minor from Marietta, GA. She wants to be involved with writing, teaching, and missions worldwide.

### Ashley Denning

Ashley Denning is graduating in May 2008 with a B.A. in English and minors in Spanish and Latin American Studies. She enjoys traveling, reading, good literature, and kittens. Vamos a las vida!

### Genevieve Gorreia

Genevieve Correia is a student at Lee University. She enjoys taking photos of the things she sees around her, one of which has been showcased in this issue of the Lee Review.

### Joshua Floyd

Joshua Floyd has lived with poetry since the age of 16. Breathed & grown with the sweet disease. Raged & called & cried & begged for a change in the wasteland.

### Kristen Fulcher

Kristen Fulcher is a freshman hailing from the sprawling metropolis of Farmville, Virginia and has not yet declared a major. Her four greatest loves are music, Dr. Pepper, photography and travel. In fact, her photo was taken in the summer of 2007 on a trip to Italy.

### Alex Lisic

Alex Lisic is an accomplished photographer and writer currently living in Cleveland, TN. Alex was born in Roanoke, Virginia, raised in

## Contributors' Notes

Cookeville, TN, and is currently studying at Lee University and Tennessee Technological University, pursuing degrees in Communications and Organizational Leadership. "The point of my work," he says, "is to make you feel something. If I can do that, I have accomplished something truly amazing."

### Brittany Livingston

Brittany Livingston is a sophomore who enjoys writing, bright colors, and recreating 80's attire.

### Matthew Melton

JM Melton works at Lee University and has been writing since he was 11 years old. He grew up in Virginia Beach, VA, but calls Cleveland, TN his home, where he lives with his wife, Leslie, and his son, Nicholas.

### Jamie Miller

Jamie Miller is a junior English Lit major. She enjoys all things artistic and would not be where she is today without Regina Greg and Pat Webb.

### Matthew Nelson

Matt Nelson is a twenty-year-old junior from Georgia who loves getting lost outside and finding his way to the rocks, writing through his encounters to find truth in who God is, and learning new sports, hobbies, and recipes along the way.

### Kevan O'Connor

Kevan O'Connor is a boring freshman English major from Tullahoma, TN. In his spare time, he avoids watching sunsets, long walks on the beach, and other clichés.



## Contributors' Notes

### Sonja Palmer

Sonja Palmer is a junior English major. She likes to read and dance in her kitchen.

### Amanda Panos

Mandy Panos is a junior pursuing a major in Psychology. From San Diego, CA, she is not very fond of cold weather and anticipates returning home soon to the palm trees and sunshine. She has witnessed a sea turtle give birth in Costa Rica, slid down a salt mine in Austria, and pet a camel at a Russian circus. She likes to write poetry sometimes.

### David Pemberton

David Pemberton is a junior level writing major, although he has terrible penmanship. He wants to write movies and feels confident in this because most modern screenplays are written on typewriters or high grade computing systems. Once, he took some photographs.

### Caitlin Pierson

Caitlin Pierson is a senior English-Writing major at Lee University. She has five fully formed fingers on each hand as well as a stunning lack of testosterone that makes her life's only goal of growing a beard rather difficult.

### Christopher Sirico

Chris Sirico hopes to be an illustrator, graphic designer and graphic novelist. "I love brush and ink; there's something magical about communicating form with a few black lines."

### Shashank Shrestha

Shashank Shrestha is an international student from Nepal. He is currently in his 2nd semester of his freshman year and his major is Telcommunications. He is a hobby photographer and has the incredible



## Contributors' Notes

ability to barf on command.

### Aubrey Stout

Aubrey Stout is a 21-year-old senior graduating in May, with much joy and trepidation. With no immediate plans for grad-school (maybe later—much later), she hopes to use her English writing degree to write brilliant short stories, which will sell so well they'll float her travels throughout Europe.

### Jonathan Tully

Jon Tully is a senior English education major. He aspires to influence the field of poetry (although not through a career in writing), to be published, and to find a sympathetic audience. "Love Like Mayflies" and "Pandora Like Me" were written while trying to deal with the emotional realities of relationships.

### Joshua Warlick

Joshua Warlick is a junior Communications/Advertising major and Art minor from Warner Robins, Georgia. He enjoys writing, drawing, photography, playing guitar and being with friends. His family just recently adopted a beautiful little girl from Ethiopia—her name is Juliana Rogers.

### Leandra Webb

Leandra Webb is a third year English major from Sevierville, TN. Aside from writing, she has enjoyed expressing herself artistically ever since she could hold a crayon and scribble on the walls.





- Berry •
- Branam •
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- B. Brown •
- K. Brown •
- Chalcraft •
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- Denning •
- Floyd •
- Fulcher •
- Lisic •
- Livingston •
- Melton •
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- Tully •
- Warlick •
- Webb •